

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 02298

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, UK

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT DEFEATED TWICE IN COMMONS FEBRUARY 11

REF: LONDON 2198

SUMMARY. GOVERNMENT SUFFERED TWO DEFEATS IN VOTING IN COMMONS FEBRUARY 11 ON MINOR ISSUES. CONSERVATIVE MOTION TO CUT PAY OF INDUSTRY SECRETARY VARLEY CARRIED BY FIVE VOTES AND CONSERVATIVES DEFEATED GOVERNMENT SUPPORTED PRIVATE BILL BY MAJORITY OF 164. DEFEATS DO NOT, HOWEVER, CALL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY INTO QUESTION THOUGH GOVERNMENT EMBARRASSED. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER GOVERNMENT SUCCESS IN DEFEATING DETERMINED CONSERVATIVE EFFORT TO VOTE DOWN DOCK WORK BILL FEBRUARY 10 (REFTEL) CONSERVATIVES SUCCESSFULLY DEFEATED GOVERNMENT ON TWO SEPARATE BILLS IN THE COMMONS FEBRUARY 11. GOVERNMENT EMBARRASSMENT AND EVEN RAGE OVER DEFEAT HAVE ONLY ADDED TO OPPOSITION'S WAVE OF ENTHUSIASM AND SUPPORT FOR THATCHER LEADERSHIP AND ITS TACTICS.

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2. CONSERVATIVE MOTION CALLED FOR CUTTING SALARY OF

GOVERNMENT INDUSTRY SECRETARY ERIC VARLEY BECAUSE OF CHRYSLER SETTLEMENT, WHICH CONSERVATIVES SAW AS ABANDONMENT OF GOVERNMENT'S CHECKERS POLICY TO BACK WINNING RATHER THAN LOSING INDUSTRIAL FIRMS. CONSERVATIVES PROPOSED THAT SALARY OF VARLEY BE CUT BY 1,000 POUNDS ANNUALLY AS PENALTY FOR HIS PARTICIPATION IN CHRYSLER SCHEME. INITIAL VOTE ON MOTION MISFIRE, WITH GOVERNMENT (MELLISH) CALLING FOR A RECOUNT SINCE MISTAKE HAD BEEN MADE IN GOVERNMENT LOBBY. GOVERNMENT CHIEF WHIP MELLISH THEN ASKED THAT VOTE BE RETAKEN AT A DIFFERENT TIME. CONSERVATIVES OPPOSED THIS PLOY, KNOWING LABOR MP'S HAD DEPARTED HOUSE, AND SPEAKER (NEWLY INSTALLED GEORGE THOMAS) CALLED SECOND BALLOT IMMEDIATELY. ANNOUNCED VOTE FOLLOWING SECOND BALLOT WAS 214 TO 209. (WE ASSUME GOVERNMENT PROBABLY LOST ON FIRST BALLOT AS WELL AND MELLISH REQUESTED REBALLOTING IN ORDER TO ASSURE ADDITIONAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT.)

3. SECOND ISSUE AROSE SOME THREE HOURS LATER WITH DEFEAT OF WEST MIDLANDS COUNTY COUNCIL BILL BY 268 TO 104. THIS BILL WAS A PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILL WHICH HAD RECEIVED GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND A THREE-LINE WHIP.

4. CONSERVATIVE VICTORIES IN THESE TWO INSTANCES ARE IMPORTANT INTERNALLY WITHIN THE PARTY IN DEMONSTRATING THE DETERMINATION, WILL AND SKILLED TACTICS OF LEADERSHIP, PARTICULARLY WHEN PARTY IS BEING CRITICIZED FOR THE LACK OF AGGRESSIVE OPPOSITION. THEY DO NOT, HOWEVER, CALL INTO QUESTION GOVERNMENT'S REMAINING IN POWER BUT DEMONSTRATE FRAGILITY OF LABOR MAJORITY. DEFEATS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY MEAN GREATER GOVERNMENT ATTENTION TO PETTY DETAILS, TO ABSENTEEISM OF MEMBERS, AND INCREASE ITS ALERTNESS TO TACTICS OF OPPOSITION WHO WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO EMBARRASS GOVERNMENT FURTHER.

. CONSERVATIVE VICTORY IS, OF COURSE, A FLUKE AND REINSTATEMENT OF VARLEY'S SALARY WILL BE ATTEMPTED IN A GOVERNMENT MOTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE. NONETHELESS, THE GOVERNMENT'S DEFEAT IS IMPORTANT PSYCHOLOGICALLY TO THE TORIES WHO ARE CALLING THE DEFEAT AN "ANNIVERSARY PRESENT
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FOR MARGARET THATCHER". CELEBRATING ONE YEAR AS LEADER.

MILLER

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